

FOR THE RECORD: 2004 FEDERAL ELECTION POLLING POST MORTEM

*How 3.78% of All Votes Cast On Election Night Handed The
Liberals A Minority Government and The Conservatives A Back
Seat*

*Evidence Indicates That Last Hour Vote Shifting In Ontario and
Quebec Had Greatest Impact on Outcome*

*Election Polling and Seat Projection Methodologies and
Apparatus Sound – Voters Shifted Intentions After Polling
Results Released*



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Sound – Voters Shifted Intentions After Polling Results Released*

Toronto, ON – A post election review of the available evidence indicates that while the final polls released in the last days of the 2004 Canadian Federal Election Campaign indicated a race that was “too close to call”, and the seat models suggested an outcome that was different from the actual results, the explanation for this discrepancy is straight-forward: timing.

The survey methods of the various polling firms, and their subsequent seat models, were sound and accurate. However, the results of the 2004 election campaign were greatly influenced *by a shift in voter support in seat rich Ontario, and to a lesser extent in Quebec, in the last 24 hours of the campaign.*

Evidence shows that while the intensity of the shift in Ontario happened the night before the vote, it also appears that there was a net switch from the final Ipsos-Reid poll concluded on the night of Wednesday, June 23 to the end of voting on the evening of Monday, June 28 of 6.7 points – it would appear that approximately 340,000* voters in the province moved to the Liberals over that timeframe and changed the national outcome from what was recorded on Wednesday night. In Quebec, the Liberals garnered an extra 4.9 points or approximately 168,000** votes in the same timeframe.



In all, of the 13,489,713 voters who turned out on June 28 to cast their ballots, a mere 506,851 voters (or 3.78 percent of all votes cast) determined the outcome of the election in the dying hours of the campaign.

It's also apparent that this shift cost the Federal Conservative Party in Ontario a significant share of seats and enabled the Federal Liberals to secure their victory. This, when combined with a boost in the Province of Quebec, handed the Liberal Party a solid plurality of seats even though five days earlier they were staring possible defeat in the face.

While no pollster in Canada predicted the magnitude of the Liberal's victory, this does not mean that the polling was "wrong". Rather, a review of the evidence indicates that the polling and seat models presented at the end of the campaign were on target, but that the campaign had yet to have its full impact on voters when the polls were undertaken and released.

Further, because Canada's election laws prohibit the release of new polls on voting day, the final shift would not have been reported in time to correct the record until after the votes were counted and the outcome known. In fact, lost in the coverage of the Monday night tally was a lone national exit poll (by COMPAS) that accurately predicted the outcome and underscored the importance of vote shifting in the last 24 hours of the campaign.

*Elections Canada final voter turnout Ontario: 5,060,308

**Elections Canada final voter turnout Quebec: 3,424,713

The Final Polls...

The final publicly released Ipsos-Reid poll in the 2004 Federal Election campaign was conducted by telephone with a representative sample of 2,000 Canadian adults between



Monday, June 21 and Wednesday, June 23. The results were released the morning of Friday, June 25th.

It was a similar story for all of Canada's major pollsters. All had finished their interviewing by the evening of Thursday, June 24, with the final publicly released polls published on Saturday, June 26. Canadian law prohibits the publishing of new voter surveys on election day until after balloting is completed.

The following are the final survey results reported by each of Canada's major polling firms:

Final Poll Results						
	Actual	Ipsos-Reid	Ekos	EnviroNics	Compas	SES
Liberal	36.7	32	32.6	33	34	34
Cons	29.6	31	31.8	33	33	30
NDP	15.7	17	19.0	18	15	20
Bloc	12.4	12	11.2	11	13	14
Green	4.3	6	5.0	5	5	4

Ipsos-Reid: June 21-23, N=2000

Ekos: June 21-24, N=4,159

EnviroNics: June 17-22, N=1,444

COMPAS: June 22-23, N=800

SES: (Three day average) June 24th, N=1200

The following are the poll results issued by Ipsos-Reid on Friday, June 25, 2004 contrasted with the actual election results:

REGION	NATIONAL			BC			ALBERTA			SASK/MAN			ONTARIO			QUEBEC			ATLANTIC		
Source:	I-R [*]	Act ⁺	Var	I-R ^{**}	Act	Var	I-R	Act	Var	I-R	Act ⁺⁺	Var	I-R	Act	Var	I-R	Act	Var	I-R	Act ⁺⁺	Var
Liberal	32	36.7	4.7	25	28.6	3.6	20	22	2	32	30.2	2.2	38	44.7	6.7	29	33.9	4.9	44	46.2	2.2
Cons	31	29.6	1.4	38	36.2	1.8	59	61.6	2.6	36	40.6	4.6	34	31.5	2.5	9	8.8	0.2	23	30.5	7.5
NDP	17	15.7	1.3	26	26.6	0.6	11	9.5	1.5	25	23.4	1.6	20	18.1	1.9	5	4.6	0.4	26	19.8	6.2
Bloc	12	12.4	0.4													48	48.8	0.8			
Green	6	4.3	1.7	8	6.4	1.6	6	6.2	0.2	5	2.7	2.3	6	4.5	1.5	5	3.2	1.8	7	3.1	3.9
Mar Error	± 2.2			± 3.5			± 7.1			± 10			± 3.8			± 4.5			± 8.2		



NOTES:

- * Final release Friday, June 25, 2004. Polling conducted Monday, June 21 - Wednesday, June 23, 2004. 2,000 Sample. Margin of error: ±2.2
- ** Final Release, Friday, June 25, 2004. Polling conducted Monday, June 21 - Wednesday, June 23, 2004. 800 Sample. Margin of error: ±3.5
- + Elections Canada results as of Wednesday, June 30, 2004.
- ++ Elections Canada results as of Wednesday, June 30, 2004. Regional Average.

Sunday Night...

While Ipsos-Reid was unable to release any results from its on-going Omnibus polling which remained in field from Friday, June 25 to Sunday, June 27 these results are presented below for Ontario only. Note the spike in decided support for the Liberals registered on the night of Sunday, June 27.

Overnight Tracking, Ontario – End of Campaign

ONTARIO RESPONDENTS							
	Monday 21-Jun	Tuesday 22-Jun	Wednesday 23-Jun	Thursday 24-Jun	Friday 25-Jun	Saturday 26-Jun	Sunday 27-Jun
DECIDED VOTER (Leaners Included)							
The Conservative Party	31%	37%	30%	NO INTERVIEWS	36%	36%	31%
The Liberals	37%	35%	42%		35%	36%	47%
The New Democratic Party	22%	21%	19%		17%	22%	17%
The Green Party	6%	5%	8%		6%	6%	4%
Other party	3%	2%	1%		6%	0%	1%

What is clear from our findings is that the Liberal plurality was not secured until Sunday, June 27. This was caused by a 6.7 percent surge in Liberal support in Ontario which netted them an additional 15-20 seats. Further, a bounce of 4.5 percent for the Liberals in Quebec gave the Liberals an additional ten seats.

But, even though the Sunday night number in Ontario should have been a clue as to what was happening, when aggregated with the previous three nights of polling, its impact on the



poll results was muted. In fact, we only discovered the spike in Ontario when we conducted a post-election audit of our last week of polling.

Further evidence of a last minute surge for the Liberals is provided by the independent, SSHRC-sponsored Canadian Election Study. The study's authors stated in a July 14th op.ed. piece in the Globe and Mail that: "there was a Liberal surge in the very last days of the campaign...[i]n fact the Liberals only managed to close the gap with the Conservatives at the very end of the campaign." The authors also state that: "many voters remained undecided about their vote choice until the very end. On the eve of the election, around 20% of our respondents had still not decided how to vote. More importantly, fully a third of those who indicated that they were intending to vote for a given party also said that they could still change their mind."

While we may quibble with how the Canadian Election Study's authors define "undecided", there was evidence of softness in voting intentions throughout the campaign. Our own surveys consistently showed that one-in-five decided voters said that they could change their vote prior to Election Day.

Last minute decision-making was also highlighted in a voter exit survey conducted by COMPAS for Global News and released on voting day after the polls closed. The COMPAS study showed that 22% of those who voted said they had made their decision on which party to vote for only on voting day.

In short, the polling conducted by Ipsos-Reid and Canada's other pollsters, was accurate for the time period it covered. And, save the last minute surge for the Liberals in Ontario and Quebec, the final published Ipsos-Reid poll captured all of the other regional results close to the expected margin of error.



The simple fact is that the outcome of the 2004 Federal Election Campaign was determined in the final 24 hours by 6.7 percent of Ontario voters who moved to the Liberals, and by another 4.9 percent of Quebec voters who also shifted to the Liberals. While two other regions (Sask/Man and Atlantic) appear to have had some voter shifts between Wednesday, June 23 and Monday June 28, the adjustment to overall seat counts was minimal.

Seat Models...

A number of polling firms and media outlets used “seat models” in this campaign to predict seat counts for the various parties. Seat models have been used in previous campaigns, most recently in the 2003 Ontario Provincial election, where the results predicted were within two seats of the actual outcome.

The following seat counts were produced in the last week of the campaign:

Ekos :	Lib 117, Cons 109, Bloc 55, NDP 27
Leger Marketing:	Lib 97, Cons 100, Bloc 43, NDP 18 [Sic]
Election Engineering:	Lib 99, Cons 115, Bloc 66, NDP 28
LISPOP:	Lib 108, Cons 115, Bloc 59, NDP 26
Ipsos-Reid:	Lib 99-103, Cons 115-119, NDP 22-26 and Bloc 64-68.

All firms used their latest polling data (or the last publicly-available data) to compile their final models and because of the last minute shift in voter support all of the models missed the final outcome.

As noted above, on Friday, June 25 the Ipsos-Reid seat model predicted a potential Conservative *plurality* with the Conservatives potentially winning between 115 and 119 seats, the Liberals at 99-103 seats, the NDP at 22-26 seats and the Bloc at 64-68 seats. When the Ipsos-Reid seat model was tested with the *actual* results of the election, the seat model produced the following seat counts:



PARTY	MODEL	ACTUAL
Liberals	137	135
Conservatives	101	99
NDP	15	19
Bloc	55	54

This shows that neither the polling nor the seat models were incorrect for the time in which they were conducted.

The following provides a detailed analysis by Dr. Barry Kay of his seat model used by Global Television. His analysis confirms the point made above.

***“The 2004 National Election Seat Projection: A Post Mortem
Laurier Institute for the Study of Public Opinion and Policy...***

The following analysis is presented in the context of discussions about the performance of seat-projection models in the recent June 28th federal election. It provides two separate projections based on the “regional swing” model developed by Dr. Barry Kay and featured on the LISPOP website during the election campaign. Table 1 presents the final pre-election projection – a projection based on seven national polls conducted between June 17-25, and involving a grand sample of 15,150 respondents. In addition to the seat projection itself, each regional party cell includes in parentheses the vote percentage estimate based on the weighted sample of the seven national polls. It was that percentage estimate that served as the basis for the projection. Table 2 presents a post-dicted seat projection based on the actual regional-vote percentages achieved by the parties as reported on election night. The actual vote percentages are provided in parentheses. The actual “seats won” is also presented in square brackets. For the sake of simple replication, the seat projection is based solely on the regional swing itself – that is, there has been no adjustment for factors such as incumbency.



It should be emphasized that the projection is based almost entirely on the polling data available. While it is possible that the polling data are inaccurate, the remarkable consistency of the seven national polls during the week prior to the vote casts doubt on such an interpretation. An alternate and more persuasive explanation is that public opinion shifted between June 25th – when the last polls were completed – and voting day, June 28th. Support for this hypothesis can be found in a Compas Research election-day poll, and from informal reports about Ipsos-Reid polling in the two days before the election.

As an example, the pre-election week surveys averaged a 5% Liberal lead in Ontario over the Conservatives, and our projection was based on that lead. On election day, the lead was actually 13% in Ontario. This shift alone would have altered our projection adding 17 additional seats to the Liberals (13 from the Conservative column and 4 from the NDP).

Table 1. Projected Distribution of Seats by Party and Region based on June 17-25 National Polls

	LIBERALS	CONS	NDP	BLOC
Canada	108	115	26	59
Atlantic Region	17	11	4	--
	-41%	-32%	-24%	
Quebec	16	--	--	59
	-28%			-50%
Ontario	57	40	9	--
	-39%	-34%	-20%	
Prairies	9	14	8	--
	-30%	-39%	-25%	
Alberta	2	26	--	--
	-22%	-57%		
British Columbia	7	24	5	--
	-29%	-41%	-26%	



Table 2. Postdicted Distribution of Seats by Party and Region based on the Actual June 28th National Election Results Using the Regional Swing Model [Actual Results in Square Brackets as of June 30th]

	LIBERALS	CONS	NDP	BLOC
Canada	130	101	22	55
	[135]	[99]	[19]	[54]
Atlantic Region	17	11	4	--
	-43%	-30%	-22%	
Quebec	20	--	--	55
	-33%			-48%
Ontario	74	27	5	--
	-44%	-31%	-18%	
Prairies	9	14	8	--
	-30%	-40%	-23%	
Alberta	2	26	--	--
	-21%	-61%		
British Columbia	8	23	5	--
	-28%	-36%	-22%	

NOTE:

The “regional swing” model is more fully explained in a paper originally prepared and presented by Dr. Barry Kay to the 1990 annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, entitled “Improving Upon the Cube Law: A regional Swing Model for Converting Canadian Popular Vote into Parliamentary Seats”. It should be noted that the application of the model above does not make use of the “incumbency effect” described in that paper. In tests for past elections, using late campaign polls to project electoral outcomes, the model has proved to be accurate within an average of four seats per party since 1963. Readers interested in post-dictions for past federal elections dating back to 1963, for projections using pre-election polls dating back to the 1980 federal election and for three Ontario provincial elections, may contact me at bkay@wlu.ca.”



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CONCLUSION:

To conclude, the evidence is clear: the pollsters didn't get it wrong. The last polls of the campaign were fielded too early to catch the last minute switch in voter support to the Liberals. It would appear that the difference between the last publicly released polls and the actual outcome of the 2004 election is the result of unfortunate timing, not faulty research.

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